

SEPTEMBER 29, 1977

High winds and cracked ground have started the episode that is known in the Shortgrass Country as "the flight for the scales." San Angelo had over 17,000 head of cattle pass through the yards for the week opening on the 19th. Men of great courage and solid means put wheels under their calves to avoid the risk of pulling the old cows down further to face the winter. Grey beards and tender cheeks alike chose to sell. Clear horizons and star-filled nights have so far proved their case.

While the rush was on, I've been helping work sheep on a piece basis. Four other mounted men and myself have been fully occupied harvesting the late lamb crop. The extraction and gathering of drouth lambs from half dead broom weeds and full leafed mesquite has turned the autumn days into a series of scenes that explain why the romance of the rangelands has such a strong tie on us all.

I thought just yesterday as we drove a string of ewes down the railroad fence: Legend, they say, claims that Nero fiddled as Rome burned. Here you sit, Noelke, astraddle a horse following a herd of ewes on the same trails of your forefathers. Breathing dust and dodging limbs in the same patterns, on the same paths they did.

Watch that old ewe that keeps reaching through the fence for ripe prickly pear apples to destroy her mouth with thorns and ruin her stomach with the seeds. Her greatest grandmother probably pulled the same foul trick on someone in your heritage. Noelke, can't you hear and see and feel the drouth coming on? For the sake of the sacred, man, it hasn't rained. You haven't shipped the calves and you haven't stored \$50 worth of feed for the winter.

From these very railroad tracks, you can hear the trucks running for town. It's the third week of September. Winter will be here soon. What's ailing you? Has the wind blowing to your right broken through to the left chamber? Go back to the house. Place an emergency call for trucks. Be quick about it. Call any commission man that has an open circuit. You showed some speed going to the grass fires. Rally! Panic! Get into action and turn some of this into cash!

So the dry says pass. In Mexico, people up in the mountains peel pear apples for the sugar content. Not so long ago a Mexican lady at the ranch took tender cactus leaves and blended them into a delicious richness of eggs and onions. It was dry in those years. Time is a good teacher. But time can't be your guardian and teacher, too.